

Service Transcript

9th January 2022

Pre-service intro video – Greater than Great

Welcome notices, birthday box

Today we continue our series on THE PURSUIT OF GREATNESS. Last week we saw that we have a God who is incomparably great as the opening song told us. Today's worship is going to be based around Psalm 145 which is all about the greatness of God. Let's start the service by saying these words together – I say the white, we all say the yellow italics.

PSALM 145:1-7

- 1** *I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.*
- 2** *Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.*
- 3** *Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.*
- 4** *One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.*
- 5** *They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty—
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.*
- 6** *They tell of the power of your awesome works—
and I will proclaim your great deeds.*
- 7** *They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.*

Let's sing together of God's greatness: *Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.*

145 Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise

*The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*

- 9** *The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.*
- 10** *All your works praise you, LORD;
your faithful people extol you.*
- 11** *They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,*
- 12** *so that all people may know of your mighty acts
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.*
- 13** *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations.*

Our God is great. Creation testifies of it. His awesome words express his greatness. He's worthy of our praise.

But our God is great because He is gracious and compassionate. *The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.* God is great because he shows compassion, grace, love to those in His creation: to you and me. And nowhere is that expressed more in His own dear Son. We're going to sing about it now as we say to our God. *How great Thou art.*

425 How great Thou art

Prayer of Response

*The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.[C]*

14 *The LORD upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.*

15 *The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food at the proper time.*

16 *You open your hand
and satisfy the desires of every living thing.*

Int. Prayers – based on Weekly Sheet

977 How deep the Father's love for us

The Pursuit of Greatness: Childlikeness

TITLE to UNIVERSE PICTURE

Our worship this morning has focussed on the greatness of God. He is the Creator God; great in power and great in glory. That is witnessed in creation and as the Psalmist said also seen His mighty deeds.

CROSS

For us though the greatness of God is also shown in His love for us. God Himself became one of us to die to redeem us. He is great in mercy, great in grace and great in love. The One that had no need to be even mindful of us, yet in His humility, the Son of God was prepared to sacrifice Himself for us.

CALLED

I finished last week with the challenge God gives to each of us to reflect His greatness. We can most do that by being Christ-like in the way we live.

GREATEST

But what shape does that take? For the disciples, greatness was all about lording it over others. Here is Jesus' take on it.

READING

Matthew 18:1-5

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell

you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

TITLE

HE CALLED A LITTLE CHILD to come amongst them. That one must have been a shocker for the disciples! A child? Remember in those days, a child was a non-person. Someone of no importance and with no rights and with no value except I suppose to its parents. Boys became significant at their Bar Mitzvah when they were 12. But Jesus says this: *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

It's not answer that they expected. The greatest in the kingdom was the most irrelevant to them. Jesus goes on to explain why this is and how we can be great I've called it THE LITTLE CHILD TEST. From it we should be able to both discover why Jesus called his disciples to become like little children and at the same time deduce what sort of people we should be as the church of God. It's a call to reflect on our attitudes.

The first question we need to ask ourselves is DO WE HAVE A CHILDLIKE TRUST? The nature of greatness in Christ's kingdom differs from the world's idea of greatness.

VERSE *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Because being a Christian is about trust and nothing more typifies trust than that of a small child who has both the simple trust and the expectation that mum and dad will care for them. We know that becoming a Christian is a matter of simple faith and trust. The currency of the kingdom of heaven is faith. It's what moves God's heart and what the great people of God are known for. So Jesus says: *become like little children.*

Simple faith doesn't get changed for something more complicated in our walk as believers. We become no more acceptable to God for how long we have been a Christian or how many good deeds we think we have done. Faith is a leveller. By simple faith like a child, we are everything we need to be to be acceptable to the Father and be in His presence and that will always be the case.

One of the biggest issues that believers have as they become older (notice that I haven't equated that with maturity) is that they rely more and more on themselves or on worldly wisdom. That's when faith falls apart. If there is anything we should have learned from the pandemic is faith. Where is God when all rely on is stripped away? He's still there, waiting for us to trust.

The mark of all mature Christians is their implicit trust of God in situations where there seems no way out, no alternative. It's a truth that we constantly need to be reminded of and re-learn when our faith has taken a beating.

DO WE HAVE A CHILDLIKE ATTITUDE? Not only should we have a childlike trust but also a childlike attitude. Childlikeness is not only something that is about our personal trust in God, but is reflected in the way we live

VERSE *Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

Who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven – the one who takes the lowly position of a child. That's actually Jesus' answer to the question the disciples asked! He's talking about humility. It's the mark of true greatness. The humility of children is very evident. Yes they can want to be competitive and even be the greatest, but children are always dependent on their parents unless tragic circumstances have not made this possible.

Humility is a major theme in the NT and it's at the heart of Jesus' teaching: the last shall be first. We need to go lower to be higher. Our job is to humble ourselves and if there is any exalting to do, the Jesus exalts us. A great feature of a humble person is that they have little awareness of it – after all, how many people have you heard boasting of how humble they are?! Humility is always recognised by others.

VERSE

We are reminded in Philippians 2 of how Jesus, *being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!* He loved us; He loved His heavenly Father and became obedient to death on a cross for our benefit and his. What drives humility – it's a love for God and love for others that makes us put the needs of others before our own.

QUOTE

But what should humility look like in our lives.? I'm reminded again as a relatively new grandparent of how a child delights in its parents, the bond between the parent and child is a special one. To a small child, mummy and daddy are the greatest, they're wonderful. Jesus said that we must be like that with our heavenly Father. Sinclair Ferguson said: "*Humility is not simply feeling small and useless - like an inferiority complex. It is sensing how great and glorious God is and seeing myself in that light.*"

VERSE

Here is how Paul defines it in Philippians 2:3b-5 *In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.* Jesus was humility in action. That was His attitude, it should be ours. VERSE Paul said: *Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourselves with sober judgement."* Romans 12:3.

That leads us to my final question:

DO WE VALUE A CHILDLIKE FAITH? After all, if humility is what Jesus calls us to, how should that affect how we function as His people, His church. Here's what Jesus said.

VERSE *And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me..*

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He came to heal the sick and to love the outcast. He was a friend of tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. He performed the duties of the lowest household slave for His followers. He came to us, His undeserving enemies, and died for us. And this is how to we are live for each other.

However bad anyone has been, however unworthy society may deem them, however different or sinful they may seem to us, they are not outside the orbit of the love of Jesus. We should be like Jesus – full of grace and truth, both to those coming to Christ, and those in our midst, who are part of the church. However "better" or even "great" we may be in society, even how we are regarded by others in the church, we all became Christians in the same way, and we should love and care for one another in humility and grace, whoever we are.

TITLE

We need to examine ourselves. C. S. Lewis once said: "*If anyone would wish to acquire humility, I can tell him the first step - to recognize that he is proud.*" We each need to reflect on this as we have all be guilty of lack of humility and the gracelessness that comes from it. We all know it – that judgement of someone even though we didn't know the facts, a failure to show someone respect to those we have differences with, those unkind words we used because they had it coming, the person who we've talked about behind their backs, the people we've dismissed because we're right an they're not, the people we've condemned because they don't have our high moral standards and all the rest of it.

We need to humble ourselves before the Lord this morning, reflect on His words *Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* Let's come in confession before Him for those times we have not been as little children in our trust and the ways in which we have not respected the other little children who God has brought us together with. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to shape us into being truly great in His Kingdom.

CONFESSION

Personal prayer in silence then....

Dear Father

Free me to be a child. Free me to know myself loved by you. Free me of pride and pretence. Release me from all the futile and unnecessary attempts to prove myself worthy of your love. Let me know the humble prayer of being your much loved child. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

*The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.*

18 *The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*

19 *He fulfils the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.*

20 *The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.*

We place our trust in God. We can be as a child and place a simple implicit faith in Him. Why? Because He's faithful and we are going to sing about that now.

147 Great is Thy Faithfulness

*My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise his holy name
for ever and ever.*

Benediction song 460 Peace to you

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. Try to think of times when you have been treated in a superior, judgemental, patronising, humiliating or similar manner by another Christian or..... If you are really honest, recall times when you have been superior, judgemental, patronising etc. How did you feel or think the other person felt? How could it have been handled better?
2. Jesus said: *whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* What is the biggest challenge about becoming childlike (not childish)?
3. How can the picture of the child helps us in building up relationships one another? How may Philippians 2:1-11 help us?
4. Look at Matthew 17:24-27. What can we learn from it about being witnesses for Jesus?